DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 430 513 HE 032 152

AUTHOR	Hurtado, Sylvia; Milem, Jeffrey; Clayton-Pedersen, Alma; Allen, Walter
TITLE	Enacting Diverse Learning Environments: Improving the Climate for Racial/Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, Washington, DC.; George Washington Univ., Washington, DC. Graduate School of Education and Human Development.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-HE-1999-2
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	4p.; For the full report, see HE 032 153.
CONTRACT	RR-99-CO-0036
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, One Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036-1181. Tel: 800-773-3742 (Toll free); Fax: 202-452-1844; Web site: www.eriche.org
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Diversity (Student); Educational Change; Educational Discrimination; *Educational Environment; Equal Education; Ethnic Relations; Higher Education; *Institutional Environment; Minority Groups; Multicultural Education; Racial Attitudes; Racial Integration; Racial Relations; School Culture; Student School Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

This digest examines ways in which learning and educational objectives can be maximized to achieve diversity while improving social and learning environments for students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. The digest examines the literature on campus climate for racial/ethnic diversity, looks at the impact on student diversity of the campus climate, and examines institutional changes necessary to improve the racial/ethnic diversity and enhance the learning environment. These issues are examined within a framework that encompasses theories of race relations and racial attitudes, historical legacies of exclusion, and campus behaviors both inside and outside the classroom, as well as changes in government and policy and forces of sociohistorical changes in U.S. society. The needed fundamental institutional changes would include a conceptual shift in thinking about diversity and about an institution's overall teaching and learning priorities, in addition to structural changes that would allow for increased interaction and involvement among students from diverse backgrounds. (CH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ERIC®-HE Digest Series EDO-HE-1999-2
The George Washington University

1999
Department of Education

Enacting Diverse Learning Environments: Improving the Climate for Racial/Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education

Sylvia Hurtado, Jeffrey Milem, Alma Clayton-Pedersen and Walter Allen

ED 430 513

HE 032 152

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✔ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC® Clearinghouse on Higher Education
Institute for Education Policy Studies
Graduate School of Education and Human Development
One Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036-1183
visit our web site at www.eriche.org

Enacting Diverse Learning Environments: Improving the Climate for Racial/Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education

Sylvia Hurtado, Jeffrey Milem, Alma Clayton-Pedersen and Walter Allen

Research over the years has begun to provide important guidance in understanding how to achieve diversity while improving the social and learning environments for students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. One key to enacting diverse learning environments lies in understanding and developing programs and policies to improve the campus climate for racial/ethnic diversity, which involves understanding the environment from the perspectives of members from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, creating opportunities for improved race relations that permeate the classroom and extracurricular lives of students, and realizing the educational benefits of diverse learning environments for students who will need to be prepared to meet the demands of a complex, diverse society. Given the extensive effort and progress colleges and universities have made toward diversification in the last 20 to 30 years, it is important to reflect on how learning and educational objectives can be maximized.

WHAT IS THE CAMPUS CLIMATE FOR RACIAL/ETHNIC DIVERSITY?

To improve the climate, one must conceptualize it in relation to racial/ethnic diversity so that its impact can be assessed. In higher education research, the campus climate has been defined as the current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members (Peterson and Spencer 1990). These common attitudes and perceptions have been conceptualized as malleable and distinguishable from the stable norms and beliefs that may constitute an organizational culture. This perspective of the climate is modified by researchers who have begun to systematically assess the climate by examining the perceptions and attitudes of various groups on campus, and it is greatly enhanced by theories of race relations and social psychology when the psychological climate is related to racial/ethnic diversity. These theories present the notion that quite diverse views of the environment emerge as a result of racial dynamics that develop on a campus. Theories of race relations and racial attitudes assist us in understanding why an individual or group may hold a particular view of the environment. Moreover, although traditional notions of climate have focused on the psychological dimension, it is linked with a historical legacy of exclusion at the institution, its structural diversity, and behaviors on campus that include interactions inside and outside the classroom. These aspects of the institutional context are informed by changes in government and policy and the larger forces of sociohistorical change in our society. This framework provides a sense of how racial/ethnic diversity permeates many aspects of a campus environment and the many ways in which researchers have attempted to capture aspects of the issue of diversity on campus. A key finding emerging from this literature is that each aspect of this framework is connected with each other. That is, campuses can no longer speak about changes in the number of diverse students without recognizing how this change affects the psychological climate or opportunities for interaction across different groups on campus--and ultimately changes in educational outcomes for students.

WHAT IMPACT DOES THE CLIMATE FOR DIVERSITY HAVE ON STUDENTS?

An important principle underlying this conceptualization of the climate for diversity is that different racial/ethnic groups often view the campus differently, a fact that has been confirmed in numerous studies. Further, each conception is valid because it has real consequences for the individual (Astin 1968; Tierney 1987). In this regard, it is realistic to find research studies in which some elements of the climate may have more salience for particular groups and therefore take on more importance in students' lives as a result. Therefore, *Enacting Diverse Learning Environments* attempts to draw from studies on many different racial/ethnic groups to provide a balanced portrait of how different

ERIC® Clearinghouse on Higher Education
Institute for Education Policy Studies
Graduate School of Education and Human Development
One Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036-1183
visit our web site at www.eriche.org

groups view the campus climate and experience its effects. It also brings to light some of the lesser known studies to connect them with the more widely read theory and research in higher education, psychology, and sociology. Moreover, both researchers and educators must acknowledge there is much to be learned from research conducted on specific groups, including African-American, Asian Pacific-American, Latino, Native American, and white students. Overall, the literature reveals how the different, interrelated aspects of the climate for diversity are linked with a broad range of educational outcomes for diverse groups of students.

First, the research shows that increasing the racial/ethnic diversity on a campus while neglecting to attend to the racial climate can result in difficulties for students of color as well as for white students. Research has documented well how different racial/ethnic groups can experience difficulties as a result of a poor racial climate. This research shows that individuals' and particular groups' perceptions of the environment are not inconsequential or intangible, but have tangible and real effects on the transition to college and on educational outcomes. Second, many studies indicate the importance of having diverse peers in the learning environment for important outcomes, such as improvements in students' ability to engage in more complex thinking about problems and to consider multiple perspectives, and improvements in intergroup relations and understanding. Harnessing the learning that can be achieved through contact in student peer groups is key. Third, additional empirical studies reveal that, under certain optimal conditions, racial conflict can be minimized and learning environments enhanced by diversity. Much of this work suggests that providing opportunities for quality interaction and an overall climate of support results not only in a better racial climate but also in important learning outcomes for students. In many ways, racial/ethnic diversity is linked with institutional goals for learning and teaching.

HOW CAN THE CLIMATE FOR RACIAL/ETHNIC DIVERSITY BE IMPROVED TO ENHANCE THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

Improving the climate may require some fundamental institutional changes. Most basic is a conceptual shift in thinking about how diversity is central to the institution's overall priorities for teaching and learning, which also requires a change in how students are regarded or valued. Twelve principles derived from the research can become central in campus initiatives to improve the climate for racial/ethnic diversity. It begins with an articulation of how diversity is central to education and continues with self-examination. Second, institutions can structure opportunities for increased interaction and involvement among students from diverse racial/ethnic groups in the classroom and outside the classroom. A limited number of examples of promising practices in *Enacting Diverse Learning Environments* attempt to realize the potential benefits of racially/ethnically diverse student environments and intentionally create opportunities for learning and interacting across communities of difference.

REFERENCES

Astin, A.W. 1968. *The College Environment*. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education.

Bauer, K. 1998. *Understanding the Critical Components of Today's Colleges and Universities*. New Directions for Institutional Research No. 98. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hurtado, S., J.F. Milem, A. Clayton-Pedersen, and W.A. Allen. 1998. "Enhancing Campus Climates for Racial/Ethnic Diversity: Educational Policy and Practice." *Review of Higher Education* 21(3): 279-302.

Peterson, M.W., and M.G. Spencer. 1990. "Understanding Academic Culture and Climate." In *Assessing Academic Climates and Cultures*, edited by W.G. Tierney. New Directions for Institutional Research No. 68. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Smith, D.G., and Associates. 1997. *Diversity Works: The Emerging Picture of How Students Benefit*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities. 159 pp.

Tierney, W.G. 1987. "Facts and Constructs: Defining Reality in Higher Education Organizations." *Review of Higher Education* 11(1): 61-73.

This ERIC digest is based on a full-length report in the ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report series, **26-8**, Enacting Diverse Learning Environments: Improving the Climate for Racial/Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education by Sylvia Hurtado, Jeffrey Milem, Alma Clayton-Pedersen and Walter Allen. ■ This report was prepared by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education in cooperation with the Association for the Study of Higher Education and published by the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at the George Washington University. Each report is a definitive review of the literature and institutional practice on a single critical issue. Many administrators subscribe to the series and circulate reports to staff and faculty committees with responsibility in a report's topic area. ■ The eight issue series is available through subscription for $144.00 per year ($164.00 outside the U.S.). Subscriptions begin with Report 1 and conclude with Report 8 of the current series year. Single copies, at $24.00 each, can be ordered on-line at www.eriche.org/Reports and by writing to: ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports, The George Washington University, One Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036-1183, or by calling (800) 773-3742, ext. 13. Catalog available on-line and by mail. ■ This publication was partially prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. RR-99-00-0036 The opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the department. Permission is granted to copy and distribute this ERIC-HE Digest.